

Much More to America's Partnership with Macedonia than NATO

By Paul Wohlers

U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Macedonia

On May 20, President Barack Obama will welcome his 27 Allied counterparts to his home town of Chicago for a NATO Summit, where he will emphasize yet again America's abiding and strong commitment to the transatlantic Alliance. Also welcomed in Chicago will be leaders from 22 non-NATO nations, including Macedonia, participating in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. The three main issues addressed at the Summit will be Afghanistan, NATO defense capabilities, and NATO as a global hub of security with partners around the world. Underpinning these three sets of issues are three core concepts: America remains as committed as ever to the Alliance and to Europe; NATO provides to all its members the most security for the best value; and tackling our shared security challenges is a shared responsibility among all NATO members as well as valued partner countries like Macedonia.

NATO remains the most effective alliance in the world, and nobody wants to see Macedonia join NATO more than the United States. Until that happens, nobody stands more ready to assist Macedonia in taking the steps needed for a successful accession in the future. Meanwhile, NATO has a vibrant and expanding partnership program that is making the Alliance the hub of a global security network. Macedonia is a great example of this partnership. This month, the country will host a NATO military exercise, Lancer/Longbow, at its national military training center in Krivolak. More than 1,000 soldiers from the Alliance and partner nations will participate, including soldiers from the United States.

We applaud the statements of President Ivanov, Prime Minister Gruevski, and other Macedonian leaders reaffirming the country's commitment to Euro-Atlantic integration as embodied in the NATO and EU membership and accession processes. The United States has an unbreakable bond with Europe, created by shared values and common purpose. At Chicago, we will continue our efforts to enhance NATO's relationships with Macedonia and our other partners. These efforts will further strengthen the Alliance's relationship with these capable partners, who add value to Allied missions and operations and for whom the connection to NATO is a security enhancer as well.

At the same time we should remember that the multi-faceted and close partnership the United States enjoys with Macedonia is about much more than NATO. As a friend of this richly diverse country, the United States has invested well over a billion dollars in Macedonia to create jobs, reduce corruption, renovate schools, and prepare Macedonian students for the workforce. We have brought over 300 Peace Corps volunteers to serve in education and community development; we have helped train professionals in virtually every sector and sent hundreds of Macedonians to the United States on exchange programs.

Macedonia for its part has been a valued friend and partner of the United States since its independence, and will be long after the Chicago Summit. Over 2,500 Macedonian troops have

fought shoulder to shoulder with American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. We value Macedonia's contributions greatly and have witnessed the professionalism and valor of Macedonia's soldiers as they defended ISAF Headquarters and our own U.S. Embassy last September.

I am confident that our partnership will one day also include shared membership in NATO. The alliance's door remains open, and NATO has agreed that Macedonia has met all membership criteria and will be accepted as a full member upon resolution of its name dispute with Greece. America's relationship with our NATO allies is a cornerstone of our engagement with the world and enhances the security of Europe and the democratic values that we share. We look forward to the day when we can welcome our friends in Macedonia into what President Obama has described as "the most successful alliance in human history."